

The news that death had come to John Belushi, whose irreverent and rebellious humor had endeared him to millions, carried with it a sense of unmistakable and sudden loss. And, it carried with it something else as well: a naggingly familiar version of the events surrounding Belushi's death on March 5th. For one thing, the authorities' circuitously developed tale far from jibes with known facts; the only thing consistent about it is its pattern of deceit. For another, the list of progressive artists who have died under suspicious circumstances, or who have been murdered, is just too damn long and too damn indicting to allow for any unquestioning acceptance of the claim that Belushi simply burned up in the drug-fed flames of self-immolation.

Right from the beginning and continuing through today, what's been passed off as "evidence" and "fact" by the authorities and their star witness, Cathy Evelyn Smith, amounts to nothing more than a jumble of convoluted and self-contradictory statements. Alongside every official "revelation" delivered so as to declare "case closed" lie gaping inconsistencies as well as key facts and events that are being conspicuously covered up.

The LAPD initially reported March 5th that Belushi died of "natural causes" and that no drugs or paraphernalia were found in his bungalow. A temporary freeze was declared on any further statements as the coroner's office stepped in. A routine autopsy and toxicological analysis, normally taking little more than 24 hours, this time required six full days to complete. Finally, on March 11th, after John Belushi's body was deep in the ground, the coroner's office released its ruling: death by overdose of heroin and cocaine, injected intravenously (speedballing). They also announced that drugs and a syringe had been found on the premises after all. Conveniently this ruling automatically implies self-destruction, relieving the state of any legal obligation to investigate further; the fact that the body was already buried presented anyone wishing to pursue the matter with a tangled and time-consuming legal morass. And for Coroner Thomas Noguchi — whose office was engulfed in controversy before and during the investigation (attesting to just how political such "routine matters" can be) — the storms subsided the week after the ruling was delivered — his position once again secure.

While the coroner's report held that Belushi's overdose resulted from speedballing, under recent questioning by *RW* reporters, the San Diego County Coroner's Toxicology Office (which did the blood tests on Belushi) stated that the heroin *alone* in his body was enough to kill him. But John Belushi did not *do* heroin. Despite media depictions of Belushi's death as but the inevitable, logical outcome of a lifestyle played dangerously on and over the edge, this alleged involvement with heroin stands in marked contrast to everything Belushi's close associates know about him.

Except, it seems, for two unnamed sources, "Hollywood producers," who were prominently quoted in an *L.A. Times* article shortly after the coroner's report, stating that Belushi had been shooting heroin for two years. These alle-

THE KILLING THINGS ABOUT THE DEATH OF JOHN BELUSHI



gations provoked angry, outraged responses from a wide spectrum of Belushi's friends and associates, and are also in contradiction to the coroner's report itself, which stated that they had found needle marks but no track marks that long-term use would necessarily cause. Judy Jacklin, Belushi's wife, and others demanded to know how these no-names knew what those closest to him did not, and recounted his abhorrence of needles. Others cited the rigorous program of training and roadwork Belushi had been doing under the supervision of his trainer, Bill Wallace, and pointed out how impossible it would have been for anyone doing heroin during the same period.

As Belushi's friend and long-time associate Dan Ackroyd put it in the April 29 edition of *Rolling Stone*, "The thing that killed John was not a habitual element in his list of pleasures. I believe that he was being led into an experiment, and that he was assisted in a flirtation with this new and dangerous substance. Three packs a day, a bottle of Courvoisier, la Cocaina, maybe, but Jones was not his Jones. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that two-

'movie producers' claimed John was shooting this stuff for two years. People, the man who grasped me, danced with me, met my eye and planned the future was not a junkie

"The John I knew could only have been assisted into oblivion during the course of an experiment. He hated needles and could never have inserted a hypo into himself. He wasn't that good a mechanic

"The full rewards of knowing and being with John will never be totally understood by even those who loved his work, don't care how he died and are just sorry he's gone. To these people, I say his sweetness and generosity were as big as his appetite for life."

Exactly because there are many people concerned with how Belushi died, the media generally, and the *L.A. Times* in particular, has been attempting to smooth over the rough-edged circumstances of his death. In this respect, the *L.A. Times* is no stranger to the art of peddling misinformation from "unnamed sources" in the service of character assassination. This is the same paper, after all, which "leaked" the FBI-inspired smear stories about actress Jean Seberg in 1970, lies that were calculated to punish her in the public eye for her involvement with the Black Panthers; lies that were part of a campaign that eventually resulted in her "suicide." Bill Thomas, now the editor of the *Times*, was at that time the city desk editor who assured reporters that the Seberg stories came from a "pretty good source." Far from contributing to a thunderous "case closed" atmosphere, such media misinformation tactics have aroused much indignation and added another dimension to a picture suggesting "cover-up."

Of particular interest in this whole scenario is the widely glossed-over statement made by Police Chief Daryl Gates at the March 11th press conference. In response to a question about whether Belushi injected the drugs voluntarily or was injected by someone else, Gates replied: "Our investigators are pretty well convinced that it (the drug — *RW*) was something he wanted administered." *Wanted administered?* What about Cathy E. Smith's testimony to police Belushi retired alone to a back room of his bungalow to

take care of "his private concern"? Do "self-administered" and "wanted administered" suddenly have identical meanings? Or is this simply a poor choice of words by Chief Gates, a mere slip of the lip as it were?

Perhaps some indications can be found in yet another twist in the authorities' story. The latest convoluted (which for now holds "official" status) contradicts the police statements sworn to on March 11th that drugs and paraphernalia were found in the bungalow: now it is revealed that the syringe and spoon with traces of heroin on it were provided to the police by none other than Cathy Evelyn Smith! Though Smith claims she had taken the items to avoid arousing the maid's suspicions (and Hollywood maids are renowned for discretion), this "wanted administered" appears to be more than a turn of phrase.

And just who is this vital link in the whole story anyway? Evelyn Smith has been led from the shadows on two separate occasions to push her account of John Belushi's final hours, once on the ABC 20/20 show March 18, and more recently in the May 13 *Rolling Stone*. Fed a series of leading questions on TV, she presented a stereotypical picture of the Hollywood scene, with Belushi cavorting through a night of seemingly endless wine drinking, coke snorting and "speedballing." According to Smith, Belushi was so far off the deep end that he continued with a solo act of same for three more hours after friends had long since departed, and after he had thrown up once already. At some point during this period, Belushi supposedly went into a back room and shot up once more. By 8:00 a.m., after taking a shower, he was in bed "shaking and wheezing." Smith explains that she shook him awake at 9:30 and gave him a glass of water to drink. Despite professed concern over his breathing, she left at 10:30, learning of Belushi's death only upon her return later in the afternoon. Here we are expected to believe that Belushi, who was no junkie but who had enough drugs in his body to kill a couple of people, actually woke up in the middle of overdosing and drank a glass of water! But Cathy E. Smith, when asked point blank if she herself had shot Belushi up, far from mustering a denial, could only respond, "What the fuck you trying to do to me?"

Cathy Smith's credibility comes not from the coherence or accuracy of her story — how could it? On the contrary, it is *the story* she tells — combined with her checkered past, her alleged drug connections, her near-nodding performance on 20/20 and her seemingly half-memorized lines noted by the *Rolling Stone* interviewer — that make her so exceedingly *convenient* and *necessary* for the line the bourgeoisie is running about Belushi's death. For they are relying on and evoking all the mainstream images of the Hollywood party scene, hoping to create confusion with their conflicting reports and to elicit disgust at the degeneracy people know exists in the most glamorous and high muckly-muck of bourgeois entertainment circles — enabling them to pass over Belushi's death with a cynical "That's life in the fast lane, that's Hollywood." Hoping to further trade on the vast stores of ignorance and illusion about the imperialists' view towards rebellion in the arts ("he was just a come-dian, who would want to hurt him?"). Smith provides a very useful conveyor to reinforce such imagery.

And contrary to the May 13 *Rolling Stone* interview which implies that the LAPD hesitated to reveal that she had provided the drugs and syringe to them because they wanted to "protect her" from possible criminal charges, the LAPD has already shown Smith just how much they care about protecting people like her. Twice in the recent past she's been busted on "possession of drugs/syringes." On January 4, she was held in jail for a month—even though court records indicate that a friend had paid her \$300 bail—until she pleaded guilty and was released on 12 months probation. In extending themselves to "protect" Cathy Smith now, just what is the LAPD really trying to protect? There is much more here than meets the eye.

And finally, from many angles, from friends and family and fellow artists, emerges a picture sharply contradicting the "official" story of a depressed Belushi who really had nothing to live for. His

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From Inside An Army

Greetings on May First. We are soldiers with much to say, and much that we cannot say for fear of our physical safety. We were born in the lesser-developed countries, and later found ourselves living inside a bigger, fully developed country. We have seen our people forced into lower jobs; we have seen those among our own ranks, even though born in the fully-developed country treated as we are — outsiders, outcasts, less than human. We have seen other minorities, treated even worse than us. In our travels throughout Western countries, we have come to see that what we have just described above is not something unique to us, or the one country where we live, and in whose military we find ourselves — but something that seems to be common to them all. And all of this we have seen concentrated even more in the military. We hate it. We won't fight for it.

We long to take up the banner of May First. We march with the international army, even in its embryonic stages, proud to play a part in its further development — and we are marching to end all oppression. We look to May First as a first action — an action to see how far we can go — a chance to show how strong we are, realizing by our actions many, many more will become interested in our internationalist goal. We can't say where we are from, or the countries we were born in — we can't say what major U.S. city — Atlanta, L.A., New York, we will be in on May First — but we can say we are not from America, and on May First and after, we march for no imperialist army, but in the army of the international proletariat.

See You May First,
Several members of an imperialist military service

The Internationale

French Words by EUGENE POTTIER.

Translated by CHARLES H. KERR

1. A-rise, ye pris'ners of star-va-tion! A-rise, ye wretched of the earth,
2. We want no condescending sav-ors, To rule us from a judgment hall.

For justice thunders con-dem-na-tion, A bet-ter world's in birth.
We workers ask not for their fa-vors; Let us con-sult for all.

No more tra-di-tion's chains shall bind us, A-rise, ye slaves! no more in thrall!
To make the thief disgorge his booty, To free the spir-it from its cell,

The earth shall rise on new foundations, We have been naught, we shall be all
We must ourselves decide our du-ty, We must de-cide and do it well.

REFRAIN.

'Tis the fi-nal con-flict. Let each stand in his place.

The in-ter-na-tion-ale Shall be the hu-man race.

'Tis the fi-nal con-flict, Let each stand in his place.

The in-ter-na-tional Par-ty Shall be the hu-man race.

BELUSHI

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manager, Bernie Brillstein, in the April 29 *Rolling Stone* angrily confronts these stories:

"There are two important things to remember about John Belushi. Number one, those who say he had no interest in his career in the last year are full of shit. He phoned me every morning at nine o'clock and every night at five, every damned day, to keep abreast of things and find out if I needed him for anything. His thoughts were on living and working, and he was thrilled with the new brownstone he and Judy had purchased in the Village, as well as the film projects we had in the works. People say that *Noble Rot*, the picture he was writing with Don Novello was not going to be made. That's just not true. *Noble Rot* was his next project, followed by *Joy of Sex... Spies Like Us... Moon Over Miami...* and *Mounties* with Danny for Universal. These projects were set, and the day before John died, he had a good meeting with Michael Eisner, the head of Para-mount, about the logistics." This is hardly the image of a man depressed and demoralized about life, hardly the image of a man seeking death. But it must be asked: Was his death being sought and by whom? As for those who celebrated the occasion, there is plenty of evidence on that score.

Belushi's loyalties and enthusiasm were precisely with the more oppressed and with people who went against the grain, in the arts, and in general. Coming out of the '60s and through the '70s, his in-your-face irreverence prompted millions to embrace him as "one of us." Don Novello (Father Guido Sarducci) succinctly captures Belushi's spirit of flipping the bird to the stultifying status quo: "About two months ago, John and I were working on *Noble Rot* in his office at Paramount Studios. There was a record on the turntable, and it was turned up real loud. The producer and director of the film we were writing walked into the office. One of them asked John to turn down the music. I think only people in our generation know what the phrase 'turn down the music' represents. I saw the look that shot across his face. I knew the hair was rising on his neck. He walked over lifted the needle from the record, started the song from the beginning and turned up the volume twice as loud as before."

The night of Belushi's death, Ted Kopple

of ABC Nightline was prompted to say of Belushi: "He attacked the establishment with a zeal bordering on vengeance." And in the weeks following, they certainly took their revenge, combining some highly political character assassination with a broadly aimed threat at those who don't want to turn down the music — that such "excesses" will, one way or another, lead to a bad end.

The fact that Belushi was unrepentant and continuing to stand with what was new and arising certainly caused some teeth to grind, as in this quote from the *L.A. Herald-Examiner*:

"In the past year, however, Belushi expressed his affinity for craziness in a much more unusual way. His last real passion it seems, was an art form that agreed with Belushi's anarchistic instincts: punk rock... Belushi listened incessantly to the hardest, roughest punk records he could find. And it was rumored that Belushi liked to hang out with the toughest, most hardcore punks, a crowd that trafficked in lots of liquor and tough drugs as well."

But it was the March 15 edition of *Newsweek* (hitting the newsstands about three days after his death) that most loudly sounded the bells of celebration and concentrated the horror and uptightness that gripped the upright citizenry of America when confronted with a Belushi:

"He descended on an unsuspecting nation out of nowhere, with the impact of a bowling ball dropped in a vat of Jell-O; one of those rare characters who can capture the spirit of an age — in his case somewhere between 8-1/2 and 11. He embodied the greedy little boy who lives in us, all of us, a perpetual-motion device for gratification, as irrepressible as a burp in church. He was a force of nature, given to periodic eruptions in which he spouted mashed potatoes on everything decent people hold sacred. John Belushi dead? But no-o-o-o-o. He must be dormant."

Under the heading "He Who Lives By The Sword..." a warning was delivered: "Wise up!" After all, it's not nice to spit mashed potatoes in the faces of decent people. And who were these decent people? What characters in *Animal House* received the mashed potatoes? Backward frat rats and ROTC reactionaries, soon to be fragged by their own underlings in Vietnam. It seems some people take such humor quite seriously. Others found it genuinely funny.

* * * * *

"It was just the Hollywood scene, real-

ly, nothing out of the ordinary." So says Miss Smith. But for those who find the all too "ordinary" and "business-as-usual" nature of such things as the mysterious deaths of progressive artists and the oh-

soo-casual acceptance of these crimes to be intolerable, this case will not be so easily closed.

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